THE IMAGE OF INDIA

by

General Cariappa

I have recently returned from a trip abroad - when I went out to participate in the Meetings of the World Veterans Federation firstly in Canada - then in America and finally in Japan. During my this trip - I met a wide cross section of foreign people - who talked to me understandingly of our country - of our 'headaches', and our determined efforts to deal with our many problems, some created by nature and some man made. All talked admiringly of India as the biggest democracy in the world and were appreciative of our determination to keep it as such for all time. They were all glad of this.

A few other main observations made were in regard to our not producing enough in our factories resulting from, as reported by some of their business people who had often been here - a lack of a sense of duty and purpose in the minds of many of us. They talked of our 'labourers' not putting in their normal eight hours of hard work a day - of the far too many holidays we had - of there being some ambitious plans not all of which were being implemented with drive and dedication.

Some who had visited India in recent times talked of the growing untidiness generally in many of our cities, in the streets - on the trains - in some of our offices and other establishments and of the unseemly sight of people causing nuisance in public all over the country.

Every one of us has a duty to our country to see that we give our best to have these impressions

Contd..2.

erased from the minds of not only foreign visitors but from our ourselves too, by being more tidy - more polite - more courteous and so on at all times.

Frequent references were made to our food shortage which seems to have become a hardy annual. They just could not understand why we cannot efficiently deal with rodents, insects - monkey's and so on which has been officially admitted by us, are some of the "villains" who eat up or destroy some millions of tons of our foodgrains. Not too efficient or determined implementation of plans, prepared by planners, at lower levels were often mentioned. There certainly is room for improving in offloading food grains from ships - of their storing and of their distribution. A very great deal of food can be saved by this - as today tons and tons are being wasted.

Spending a great deal of our time and money borrowed in millions -everywhere, on border issues - Goa - Belgaum - creation of new States on linguistic basis, putting up enormous factories and buildings with not much coming out of them to earn - at a time when every single minute and every single paisa should be concentrated on growing more food - producing more in our factories - stepping up exports - thereby ensuring that our Rupee soon regains its true value - many foreigners were critical of. Recently from devaluation of our rupee the man in the street is faced with a challenge. This is the time when every Minister, every Civil Servant and every one entrusted with providing for the welfare of our millions, must give every minute of his time - to matters stated earlier, instead of spending most of their time and large sums of money at conferences - seminars - deputations - threats of quitting office and so on, on language - border issues and the like. Price control can only be enforced if these officers uninterruptedly devoted most of their time to implementing the orders of the Government and so bring economic relief to millions by keeping the prices down. This also calls for the best in our Traders and

-Contd..3.

Shopkeepers - who should not take advantage of devaluation to put up their prices to fanciful high rates to rob the poor innocent millions.

The country has big problems on her frontiers - Chinese and others creating them. We have a more critical National Emergency created internally by some serious communal and/or political disunity and discords. Our hospitals and schools are not all fully stocked or staffed. Labour unrest and on occasions student disorder, threats of strikes by employees all over, are adding more problems to our country. There is a certain amount of "shining - on - borrowed - plumes", - enormous air conditioned buildings - electric lights and fans going flat out with no concern about conserving electric power. All these cannot go on indefinitely. Our borrowing must slow down considerably - if possible completely - and we must " Cut - our - coat - according to - the - cloth - we have". We must cease to think of living "a champagne life - on - a - beer - income".

It is in this content of this internal situation when the national pulse is a bit restless resulting from that measure of administrative efficiency which is required to give the people a feeling of social justice and security, not being there - that I have been very impressed with the frank utterances, on the internal economic and political situation, by our Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, at her recent Press conferences and in her Radio broadcasts. This frankness and forthrightness on her part are indeed a "breath of fresh air" to us all. No 'Sentiments' and no 'Emotions' - but down to earth hard facts seem to be her ways in her words and action.

In her interesting and illuminating Press conference the other day the Prime Minister made two important and relevant points. The first related to

Contd...6.

the economic crisis through which we are passing and which constitutes a challenge to the people and to the Government of India. In our struggle for political independence, said Mrs.Gandhi, we had gone cheerfully through hell and fire. On the other hand, in our fight for economic existence and survival, we had played it soft. We had tried to achieve it the easy way. Yet the fight for economic survival was as much a war as the fight for political independence. It was a war against poverty and want, against human misery and degradation.

The Prime Minister's second point was equally relevant and illuminating. It was made in reply to a newspaper correspondent who asked Mrs. Gandhi whether the Government's decision to devalue the rupee would not have an impact on the fortunes of the Congress Party at the polls in the coming elections. The Prime Minister's reply was characteristic. If the choice, she said, was between the nation's interests and the fortunes of the Congress, she was for the national interest. What a refreshingly truly realistic statement ?

I would like to commend these two points to your close attention for they represent an attitude of mind which unhappily is not as widespread as it should be in our country and which, in my opinion, is the only attitude of mind which spells survival, salvation and unity for India. Let us think in terms of India instead of thinking in narrow, parochial terms of parts of India - of, for instance, Goa for Maharashtra and Belgaum for Mysore, of Chandigarh tugged by Haryana on one side and Punjabi Suba on the other, on how the waters of the Krishna should be divided between two neighbouring States who seem hell-bent on settling the issues in almost every other way but that of good neighbourliness.

Contd..5

At her Press conference the Prime Minister deplored these tendencies and rightly condemned them. "It is unfortunate", she said, "that people should get worked up about these issues. After all, we are living in the same country. I don't think attention should be diverted to other issues, particularly when the country is faced with grave problems".

Here spoke wisdom and commonsense. And as a simple soldier, a "VOC" as I like to call myself - A Very Ordinary Chap - I fully endorse the Prime Minister's advice and appeal. The next five to ten years are going to be the most crucial for India since independence. The coming critical decade will decide whether India will negotiate the hump or not. Clearly, over the past fifteen years and more we in India have been living a lotus-eater's existence, content to let things slide and slip by in the vain hope that something or the other would turn up to jog us along. We have, in the Prime Minister's words, had it too soft, and inevitably retribution has come. We have now received a 'jolt' of our own making. Let this jolt - jolt us to wake up and unite us as a team to stave off the economic and other dangers lurking round the corner, to o security - to our survival as a free democracy.

India's first need is unity, and from unit strength. The one flows from the other. But in order to achieve unity and, from it, strength we must first learn discipline. Discipline of the mind and the body, of our feelings and thoughts, is what we need most. The first step in achieving this is to close our divided ranks. I would suggest that the best way to bring this about is to declare and to observe a moratorium on all internal feuds during the critical years ahead of us. Let us have the courage of our convictions and boldly decide to decide once for all talks on creation of new Linguistic States, Goa, Belgaum

Krishna Vakera, the language issue - land ceiling and so on, until we have successfully dealt with the many problems I have referred to earlier. Patriotism requires it and demands it equally of all of us. Let each one of us rise to the challenge. We can and we will meet their challenge victoriously, if we as Indians of the India of ASHOKA AND AKBAR, of BUDHA and BAPUJI, of CHANDRAGUPTA and CHANAKYA and of a host of very great other leaders of the past, united as one team with loyalty to our heritage and serve our Motherland with a dedicated spirit. Let us remember our Prime Minister's words "COUNTRY above PARTY" and this to me is our hope for a bright future.

Jai Bharat